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CINCINNATI, OHIO  
POST & TIMES-STAR

FOIAb3b

E. 251,226

JAN 31 1966

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## Greatness at the Abyss

Sympathy is due to President de Gaulle although many who have felt his stern hand will not be inclined to grant it.

At the pinnacle of his greatness and perhaps near the eve of his retirement this powerful figure, the undoubted regenerator of France, is tainted by a scandal that shakes the diplomatic world and reflects the worst aspects of criminal intrigue.

The event is the Ben Barka scandal — the circumstances connected with the kidnap and presumed murder in Paris of a Moroccan notable last October.

As our correspondent Edwin Roth relates on the opposite page, details, slowly coming to light, indicate that elements of the forces employed on behalf of General de Gaulle to assure his own ascent to power and to consolidate his party in control went on the rampage in a welter of international conspiracy and corruption.

De Gaulle himself, of course, is no participant in the Ben Barka affair. But his alarmed followers sought to cover up Gaullist complicity. Those who helped do away with the exiled Moroccan also have done strong-arm service for De Gaulle and they know much—too much, probably, for some of those involved and deemed likely to talk have also recently met untimely ends.

All of this is dissolutive of grandeur, and in many eyes the unfortunate President of France looks like a patriotic and austere front of rectitude behind which operate phantoms

of political depravity — the "barbouzes" or false beards, political gangsters.

It is of some interest that, in the effort to disassociate the Gaullists from the deed, certain high French quarters advanced the idea that the Ben Barka scandal was the work of the CIA of the United States.

But the web appears to have been spun much more locally, and at its center — because he has controlled all the strings and glories in doing it—is De Gaulle himself.

His admission of accountability, the finally unavoidable firings of police officials, condemnations of suspected participants in the affair, and whirlwind reorganization of French security police bring his great reputation perilously close to collapse.

As Mr. Roth estimates, if the public knew as much about the Ben Barka episode before the election in France as it knows now, De Gaulle might have failed re-election.

There has not been such dismay in France for years as at the revelation that the Republic, in no small degree, has been founded on a reliance on thugs and gangsters. It is a shoddy demeaning of the enthusiasm so many had in the spiritual energy of resurgent France.

For us, it illustrates again that authoritarian government, no matter how superficially benign, well-intentioned or "necessary," rests on the power of the club, the gun and the knife. It may be open and controlled as was the case with Fascism or covert and uncontrollable as with De Gaulle.